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DE RUEHQT #2078/01 2292016
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 172016Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5067
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5882
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1940
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG 0016
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0863
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0990
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS QUITO 002078

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SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: CARRION'S MFA REFOCUSES ECUADOR'S FOREIGN POLICY

REF: A. QUITO 00646
[1](#)B. QUITO 01112

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Since taking office in October 2005, Foreign Minister Francisco Carrion, Ecuador's top career diplomat, has attempted to restore credibility to the ministry by reversing the politicization and decline of the diplomatic corps under his immediate predecessors. Part of this process involved vigorously and publicly defending Ecuadorian national interests against perceived slights from Colombia (fumigation) and the U.S. (criticizing our human rights and terrorism reports). Another important departure by Carrion entailed convoking foreign policy elites, academics, and civil society to plot the nation's foreign policy through 2020, dubbed the National Foreign Policy Plan 2006-2020 (PLANEX). PLANEX mastermind Amb. Javier Ponce told us recently that the document, due for release this fall, will seek to shift and broaden Ecuador's foreign policy focus on conflict with neighboring Peru and Ecuador's traditional multilateralism to a more strategic framework with emphasis on relations with the U.S., Asia and Spain/Europe. It will include a call for denying any foreign troop presence on Ecuadorian soil, an oblique but not definitive reference to the U.S. Forward Operating Location (FOL) in Manta. End Summary.

Carrion's MFA

[1](#)2. (SBU) Carrion's elevation to foreign minister came after a serious degradation of relations with the U.S. and Colombia under his predecessor, Antonio Parra, and marked the return to power of Ecuador's traditional foreign affairs elite. Carrion, the grandson of a cultural and literary icon, has restored the ministry's prestige and energized its regional diplomacy. He has been largely successful in rebuilding relations with Colombia and with boosting morale within the MFA's ranks. His natural left-of-center affinities still place him at odds with some U.S. policies, but he recognizes the importance of the U.S. relationship and has put it back on a more cordial, professional and productive footing. Part of his personal credibility here derives from Carrion's vigorous defense of perceived Ecuadorian sovereign interests, publicly playing off hyper-nationalistic sentiment. For example, he publicly and strenuously took issue with USG criticism of the GOE in the annual human rights and terror reports (RefTels). Privately, Carrion has been much more measured, preserving a respectful and open tone to the bilateral dialogue.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Partly as a result of his public criticism of U.S. and Colombian actions on several fronts, Carrion is widely

respected here as a champion of Ecuadorian sovereignty and is considered one of Palacio's strongest ministers. Some here now believe that Carrion might remain in office should frontrunning candidate Leon Roldos win the presidency. Carrion is considered close to the Democratic Left party leadership, which is supporting Roldos.

Towards a New Foreign Policy Agenda

14. (SBU) Carrion asked fellow career diplomat Ambassador Javier Ponce to lead the brainstorming process to develop a new, forward-looking foreign policy document based on consensus. The consensus-based PLANEX review of national objectives has entailed a seminar series (more than 15), bringing together panels of experts drawn from government and civil society (some from abroad) to focus on different foreign policy issues. The objective is to seek consensus on the challenges facing Ecuador and to inform an outcome document, scheduled to be released this fall. The first draft of the document is already circulating, and Ponce revealed some of the substance in the 150-page draft during a meeting with PolOffs on August 4.

15. (SBU) Typical of the Carrion inner circle, which cut its teeth on resolution of the 50-year border dispute with Peru, Ponce is a Harvard-educated diplomat who claims to seek to leverage the nation's relationship with the U.S. to advance democracy, stability, and economic development in Ecuador. In doing so, however, Ponce favored speakers who are decidedly critical of USG policies, assuring a final product that is skeptical of USG motives but committed to further engagement in the name of Ecuador's national interests. Ponce contrasts this outlook with Ecuador's traditional foreign policy, which has been almost exclusively focused on conflict with Peru, and seeking small country refuge in multilateralism and regionalism.

PLANEX Objectives

16. (U) The intent of this exercise, according to Ponce, is to provide the incoming government with the benefit of considered wisdom, thereby institutionalizing the main lines of Ecuador's foreign policy. It aims to develop a permanent foreign policy framework to defend national sovereignty and Ecuadorian territory; protect Ecuadorians living abroad; consolidate national identity; develop an international system more just and democratic (that preserves peace, equal distribution of wealth, and ecological preservation); and more effectively insert Ecuador in the international community to help consolidate democracy, respect for human rights, sustainable development, and security of citizens in Ecuador.

--Security: Preservation of territorial integrity based on existing agreements that set national borders; fortify capacity to control transnational crime; define function of armed services (ensure that they don't assume police functions -- language we understand to be partially directed at limiting military engagement in support of USG counternarcotics goals); establish consensus that no foreign military should have a permanent presence in Ecuador; formulate criteria for Ecuadorian participation in peacekeeping operations and fortify capacity to contribute to humanitarian missions. PLANEX documents offer some further detail, by theme:

--Immigrant Protection: The protection of Ecuadorians and their families living abroad. Protection of refugees resident in Ecuador.

--Democracy and Human Rights: International training and cooperation to strengthen state institutions (Congress, judiciary, police etc.); establish permanent mechanisms to fulfill decisions, efforts, and presentations of reports to organizations created by international human rights

instruments; and harmonize national legislation with international human rights instruments subscribed to by Ecuador.

--Colombia: Prevent the regionalization of Colombian conflict; continued respect for the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other states; coordination with other neighbors of Colombia on migration, border integration, and control of criminal organizations and illegal trafficking of persons or goods; work with regional organizations to find a peaceful solution to the Colombian conflict; and consolidate a relationship of friendship and cooperation through cultural, social, and economic integration, with special attention to energy, tourism, and commercial integration.

--International Economic Relations and Regional Integration: Economic, social, and cultural integration of Latin America is a top priority. Achieved through CAN, South American Nations, Rio Group, SELA, and ALADI. Increase economic ties with the EU through an FTA with CAN countries. Increase development cooperation to consolidate democratic institutions, human rights, environmental protection, and social and economic development for impoverished Ecuadorians.

--International Cooperation and Development: Improve capacity of Ecuador's diplomatic service; reduce the proportion of political appointees as Ambassadors; form permanent trade negotiating teams; review diplomatic presence abroad; and improve foreign policy coordination with civil society.

PLANEX: U.S.-Ecuadorian Relations

¶7. (U) Recognizing Ecuador's chronic political and development challenges, Carrion hopes to use PLANEX to focus Ecuador's bilateral relationships more strategically. According to Ponce, Carrion and others here recognize the "obvious" failings of multilateral organizations and their inability to advance change in underdeveloped countries like Ecuador. Carrion therefore seeks to refocus Ecuador's relations on key bilateral partners; Colombia, Peru, Spain, and the United States.

¶8. (SBU) Another focus of the PLANEX outcome document, according to Ponce, will be on Ecuador's democratic consolidation, respect for human rights, protection for Ecuadorian citizens living in the U.S., access of Ecuadorian products to the U.S. market, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation to combat transnational crime. Rather than addressing short-term challenges (he mentioned the FOL, FTA, ATPDEA extension), the PLANEX document would choose instead to focus on broader, more long-term interests.

¶9. (SBU) In an oblique reference to the FOL, Ponce said the PLANEX document would argue that no foreign soldiers should be permitted in Ecuador. (He admitted that it could be argued that FOL employees are not soldiers but technicians in the joint fight against drugs.) To meet its own security needs, the GOE hopes to develop indigenous capacity building mechanisms to help Ecuador monitor narco-trafficking for itself. Ponce criticized the historic role of the military here, given its direct role in the fall of Ecuador's last three presidents. U.S. military assistance, he said, could also be viewed as a threat to stability, since it reinforces the independence of the military. (Note: Carrion and Defense Minister Oswaldo Jarrin are considered close allies within the cabinet. Jarrin's Defense White Paper was published on August 10 (Septel) and like Carrion's PLANEX, purports to be Ecuador's first comprehensive defense policy review since it ended its border conflict with Peru in 1998.)

USG Interests

¶10. (SBU) Carrion has had notable success restoring

credibility and prestige to the foreign ministry during his short tenure, and PLANEX is clearly a worthy exercise from an Ecuadorian perspective. But could it end up affecting us negatively? The document certainly reflects the general ideological orientation of Ecuador's foreign policy establishment which does not fully embrace USG perspectives. The PLANEX results might initially guide the next government's policy, depending on who wins the election, either by formal adoption or less formally as an inherited political template. As such it has the potential to harm USG interests by limiting the room for maneuver of a pro-U.S. administration, particularly on Manta. It also has (lesser) potential to help us by constraining the actions of a government more overtly hostile to U.S. interests.

11. (SBU) Since the PLANEX document is non-binding, future governments will be free to invoke or ignore it as they see fit. But as an accurate reflection of prevailing policy opinion across most of the political spectrum, it portends challenges likely to be faced by the USG in advancing some of our bilateral and regional counternarcotics and counterterrorism objectives.

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